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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, EEB/CBA
STATE PASS FDA
COMMERCE FOR ITA THOFFMAN
DUBAI FOR ATO DWILLIAMS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON ETRD EAGR SOCI TBIO MU

SUBJECT: OMANI HEALTH OFFICIAL CLARIFIES MEDIA REPORTS ON
U.S. PRODUCTS

¶1. On April 6, the Arabic-language daily "Al Watan" and its sister English-language "Oman Tribune" ran front page news articles reporting that the Directorate General of Health Supervision and Sewage, under the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, was investigating a report issued by the Organic Consumers Association that 24 U.S. products were tainted with "1.4 Dioxane." The article noted that the levels of this substance found in shampoos, body washes, lotions, and other personal care products from brands such as Johnson and Johnson, Hello Kitty, Gerber, Scooby Doo, Clairol, and Sesame Street, were "five times more than the percentage allowed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration." The article further quoted Director General of Health Supervision and Sewage Said bin Darwish as stating, "It is not an easy job to confiscate all these products so it is important to confirm the truth behind this information."

¶2. In subsequent calls by ATO Dubai and Econoff to the Directorate, Darwish explained that the media misquoted him, and that further study by his office had indicated that the products met FDA standards. He criticized the shoddy journalism exhibited in producing the story, noting that the reporter simply lifted a similar article from a newspaper in Dubai a week earlier without "checking the facts." Darwish added that he appeared on Oman radio on the morning of April 8 to "set the record straight" regarding the report, and plans to follow-up with an article to be placed in the newspapers by April 12.

¶3. Comment. Traffic on Oman's Arabic Internet chat site "al-Sablah" first began a string on this topic two weeks ago with the posting of the announcement from the Organic Consumers Association. With the latest posting of the article above, six responses have been received so far, all asking for the clarification of the products "affected" by the announcement. The Directorate has since been pro-active in clarifying the safety of these products, and the Embassy will monitor the newspapers and chat sites to ensure that the public has the correct information. End Comment.

GRAPPO